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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BAGHDAD 002417

SIPDIS

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OSD FOR USDP FLOURNOY  
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EIND, SY, IR, IZ

SUBJECT: CODEL LEVIN PROBES SECURITY AND STABILITY IN IRAQ

REF: BAGHDAD 2388

Classified By: Political Military Minister Counselor Cameron Munter for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

¶1. (C) SUMMARY: As part of their September 3-4 visit to Iraq, Senators Levin, Reed, and Kaufman engaged Interior Minister Jawad Bolani and Defense Minister Abd al-Qadr al-Mufriji on Iraq's current security environment, conveying Washington's interest in Iraq's stability. In separate meetings, the two Ministers noted that recent terrorist attacks had a greater impact on civilians, and they blamed foreign-based groups for providing training, weapons, and funds to local extremists. MOI Bolani said the GOI had arrested AQI-affiliated terrorists in connection with the August 19 bombings. Both Ministers expressed confidence that the national elections in January 2010 would be a success. Regarding Iraq's military needs, the Defense Minister voiced concern over tactical air defense, equipment, and intelligence capabilities. END SUMMARY.

Fewer Terrorist Attacks with Greater Impact

¶2. (C) Interior Minister Bolani greeted CODEL Levin warmly and thanked the American people for their sacrifice and help, particularly USG support to the police apparatus of Iraq. In response to Senator Levin's questions on the security situation in Iraq and the August 19 bombing, Minister Bolani reflected on two major milestones: "We averted a civil war nearly caused by sectarian violence," he said. Second, he said U.S. and Iraqi forces have worked together to end an insurgency. Addressing the "criminal activity" of August 19, he noted that more stable states also face exposure to terrorist acts, citing the August 28 attack on Saudi Arabia's Deputy Defense Minister. Minister Bolani said that terrorists in Iraq seemed recently capable of scoring "qualitatively" stronger hits, though the number of incidents had declined, because they have improved their tactics and can better reach targets. In a separate meeting, the Defense Minister lamented, "Particularly over the last four years, we have seen an increase in operations that target civilians." Bolani shared that MOI had been collecting evidence and pursuing individuals in connection with the August 19 bombings and had arrested AQI-affiliated individuals, including seven principals (reftel).

GOI Hopeful for 2010 Elections

13. (C) Both Ministers Mufriji and Bolani acknowledged that the GOI would face security challenges in the lead-up to the January 2010 parliamentary elections. However, they expressed confidence that the government would facilitate functional elections, based on increased ISF capabilities and an elections security plan similar to that which was used in Iraq's successful January 2008 provincial elections. Bolani argued that it was necessary for Iraq to "complete a law on elections because the Election Commission needs time to prepare itself."

14. (C) Looking forward, the Interior Minister said that there are four tracks along which the GOI can organize efforts to defeat terrorists: political, economic, social, and security. The "Awakening Councils" are an example, he said, of success in the social track. On the political track, he said that Iraqis need to recognize that retaliation would only lead to more bloodshed, and that reconciliation was important. Minister Bolani asserted that institutional development -- political, military, and social -- in Iraq had been impressive since 2003. In particular, he claimed that the national justice system had made great strides in anti-corruption through effective purges and in preventing sectarianism by recruiting from diverse groups in Iraq. Minister Bolani also argued that the MOI had professionalized significantly, citing additional courses the MOI is offering on human rights, and, in the presence of MNSTC-I Commanding General Helmick, he highlighted the strong support MOI had received from MNSTC-I.

CODEL to MOD: What are Your Needs?

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15. (C) Defense Ministry officials are working closely with MNSTC-I to identify needs, and the process "makes me optimistic about the possibilities," said Minister Mufriji. In response, Levin reminded the Minister that he and his colleagues would be making decisions about military equipment that will remain in Iraq and that which the U.S. would send to Afghanistan. Levin stressed that a timely submission of a list of prioritized needs would be critical. "It will be ready in days," the Minister promised. Allocations of funds for the air, navy, and armed forces remain a challenge, as civilian infrastructure is the GOI's first priority, according to the Defense Minister. Oil, he said, could provide the income our country needs to fund its military.

16. (C) In response to Levin's question on what kind of support Iraq would need before U.S. Forces depart in 2011, the Defense Minister estimated that by 2011 Iraq would have its own navy capable of protecting Iraq's shoreline. He hoped the air force would turn into a real tactical air defense one day, but said this was unlikely by 2011 at the current pace. Training and equipment for the Iraqi air force would be critical, the Minister stressed, adding, "we rely completely on the U.S." Also, the Minister noted that Iraq had serious equipment deficiencies, reminding his guests that Iraq was cut off from technological developments from 1991-2003. Finally, Minister Mufriji said that Iraq will still need military intelligence support after 2011.

17. (C) Minister Mufriji told CODEL Levin that Iraqi forces operated daily in coordination with U.S. forces throughout Iraq. The operations are even more successful than before June 30, he noted, citing a major joint capture of an AQI financier in Mosul. He hoped that a trilateral initiative among U.S., Iraqi and KRG forces would be underway in the near future, increasing security in the disputed areas in advance of the 2010 elections.

"Deadly Politics" with Syria and Iran

18. (C) The Defense and Interior Ministers singled out Iran and Syria for their roles in creating instability in Iraq. Bolani noted that "external intervention from neighboring countries is clear," as sources of instability and support for terrorism. He added that Ba'athists from the defunct regime would like to see Iraq fail in its political development. After similar points from the Defense Minister, Senator Levin asked, "Why then, did Syrian and Iranian leaders receive heroes' welcomes when they traveled to Iraq?" "It's politics," the Minister responded. "Sounds like deadly politics to me," Senator Levin replied.

19. (U) CODEL Levin was unable to clear on this cable before their departure.  
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